

An interactive tour to discover the island of Gyaros

On the 17th of February, the people of Syros and the rest of Greece had the opportunity to participate virtually in an interactive expedition to Gyaros through Facebook. The CYCLADES LIFE team spent a full day at this former exile island and through a live transmission shared this experience with the participants of the event. Those who watched the event through their screens (more than 1300 people followed this digital expedition) entered automatically to a draw that will allow 2 lucky participants to attend as volunteers during next spring a field action that will take place in Gyaros island as part of the CYCLADES LIFE project.



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The participants of the event had the chance to discover the secrets of the island, from the dark cells of the exile prison buildings, to the mountaintop and to the sea bottom, and to have a direct interaction with Christos and Elina, the CYCLADES LIFE field team members. The team also shared the vision of the CYCLADES LIFE project, a project coordinated by WWF Greece, for the establishment of a unique Marine Protected Area around Gyaros, together with the local societies of Syros and Andros that will operate effectively for the benefit of both humans and the natural environment.



What experiences did Christos and Elina, the WWF Greece's team, shared with us during that day about Gyaros?

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The exile prison buildings



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Through an exclusive tour in the dark cells of the prison Elina Samara showed to the participants the hidden parts of the impressive buildings while sending her own message about the need to preserve the historical memory alive. She stated from the prisons: “As Mr. Katsibinis the president of the Former Exiles Association mentioned, we truly believe that the buildings should be preserved to help us remember this dark period in modern Greek history”. Watch here the video from the prison of Gyaros: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vA7AQRzESzg&feature=youtu.be>

A hike towards the mountaintop



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During the hike towards the mountaintop of Gyaros, Christos Papadas revealed the secrets of the terrestrial environment of the island, for example he talked about the black snake of Gyaros, a species of “Italian origins” which cannot be found anywhere else in Greece.

Additionally, on the path towards the mountaintop, the participants of the event discovered the abandoned settlements of Gyaros, inhabited by locals until 1947, when the island became for a second time an exile site. From the mountaintop, Christos talked about the first marine Wildlife Refuge established in Greece that was recently designated around the island. Watch the video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MEvuuBpd5Q0&feature=youtu.be>

The Yelkouan Shearwater's refuge

The participants of the event did not only discover the terrestrial and historical parts of Gyaros, they also had the chance to virtually tour around the island and learn interesting details about its natural environment. Elina Samara, in one of the stops, explained to us why Gyaros hosts one of the largest colonies of Yelkouan Shearwater, an endangered sea bird. In addition, she talked about the unique sea bottom of Gyaros which is covered 50% by *Poseidonia* meadows and coral reefs, two important marine habitats in the Mediterranean since they constitute important hatchery sites for fish species and they preserve the health of the marine environment.



An underwater refuge that can contribute to the sustainable local development

Lastly, the participants had the chance to experience virtually a dive by the field team who is working on the development of a network of underwater trails around Gyaros. Gyaros is an isolated and a windswept island that hides treasures under the surface of its troubled and often inaccessible waters. The goal of the CYCLADES LIFE project is the conservation of the natural environment while promoting sustainable local development. To that end, Christos and Elina are working towards the creation of underwater trails, a tool of environmental education that allows us to have a first-hand experience of the marine environment. These trails are an example of

sustainable tourism activities that will be promoted as part of the establishment of a Marine Protected Area around the island. As Christos Papadas stated on camera “In the case of Gyaros, we do not wish to exclude humans from the area. We wish to bring them closer to nature”.

Watch Christos and Elina talking about the underwater trails just before diving in the waters around Gyaros here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=th9TwMLOEQ4&feature=youtu.be>



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Notes for journalists:

Follow the full- day expedition to Gyaros on the site of WWF Greece here:

<http://www.wwf.gr/news/1763-explore-gyaros>

All the material is available on high resolution under request.

More information

Amalia Alberini, CYCLADES LIFE Communication, tel: 210 33 14 893, a.alberini@wwf.gr

The CYCLADES LIFE project is being implemented by WWF Greece together with the Ministry of Environment and Energy, the Decentralized Administrative Authority of the Aegean, the Development Corporation of the Cyclades SA, the Harokopio University of Athens, MOM/Hellenic Society for the Protection of the Monk Seal and the Italian Institute Tethys.

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